

Victimhood of Harassment in the Selected Poems of Confessional Writers

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Abstract

The patriarchy has wrapped women under an invisible circle of subjugation. Even in this modern world, some modern men unconsciously and unintentionally following the conventions of their ancestors who used women only for procreation and household chores. It is pathetic to see a life of woman forced to remain dependent under her family men. This situation reminds us about one of the rules written in Manusmriti “Girls are supposed to be in the custody of their father when they are children, women must be under the custody of their husband when married and under the custody of her son as widows. In no circumstances is she allowed to assert herself independently.” Even though she is capable of being independent and handling external task, she is sealed as incapable and locked inside. When women started voicing out for their rights and equality in the family and society, they are branded as immoral. Women used writing as their powerful weapon to attack the chauvinists. The main aim of this paper is to delineate how women are oppressed in the society and how they liberate themselves physically and psychologically.

Keywords: Confessional writing, confessional writers. Taslima Nasrin, Meena Kandasamy, Kamala Das, Gender Discrimination, Marital Rape, Sadism, Feminism.

Introduction

In this contemporary world there are well known controversial feminist writers from all around the world. Their poems mainly confess about the agonies and adversities women experience in their lives. These female writers took the responsibility of eradicating the system of male chauvinism from the society. Through poems women tried their best to influence men and to make them realize about the injustice committed against the feminine gender. These writers’ origin, language, culture and native may vary, but their sufferings are similar.

Taslima Nasrin is an award winning Bangladeshi writer, physician, humanist and human rights activist who fights against the violence committed women. In the poem

“Character” Taslima Nasrin speaks about the society which does not allow women to voice out against her problems.

When you keep on walking down the lane
men will follow you and whistle.

When you cross the lane and step onto the main road
men will revile you, call you a loose woman.

If you've no character
you'll turn back,
and if you have
you'll keep on going
as you're going now. (5-13)

The moment when a lady steps out of her house, she is being watched as a public property without any fence. Many men try out their luck. A good woman is always expected to act dumb in front of men who follow, whistle at her and calls her with disagreeable terms. The society disrespects the woman as characterless if she voices out against her abusers in public. It always expects women to bear all these abuses if she was born and brought up in a good family with a good character.

The poem “Happy Marriage” laments about the unhappy married life of a woman who considers suicide is much better than living with the man she married. “My life, like a sandbar, / has been taken over by a monster of a man / who wants my body under his control” (1-3). From the beginning lines itself the readers can understand about her unhappy life. As a woman she would have had so many dreams about her husband and married life, those expectations went in vain when she was tied up with a sadist. These lines “he can spit in my face, / slap me on the cheek, / pinch my rear;” (5-7) proves that as a husband a man can do anything to his wife. He can hurt her however he wants “he can rob me of the clothes, / take my naked beauty in his grip;” (9-10). Taslima Nasrin’s poems are considered to be the best example on marital rapes and sexual assault. Since marital rapes are not considered as crime in India, the offence still exists.

he can chain my feet,
with no qualms whatsoever whip me,
chop off my hands, my fingers,
sprinkle salt in the open wound,
throw ground-up black pepper in my eyes,
with a dagger can slash my thigh,
can string me up and hang me.
His goal: to control my heart
so that I would love him; (12-20)

Women are forced to experience these kind of brutality sexually, psychologically and physically and expected to remain submissive under their husbands. Some women lose their freedom and rights in terms of marriage. Though the husband harms her, she has to bear up all those tortures considering the family and culture. Men exercise rape as a tool to control women and to make them subjugated forever.

Meena Kandasamy is poetess, social activist, writer and translator from Tamil Nadu, India. Her writings voices out against the injustice done to women and Dalits. “Apology for living on” poem is about the lady who survives in this dangerous society. The title of the poem denotes that this poem confesses the apology of the poetess herself who is still surviving.

i was a helpless girl
against the brutal world of
bottom-patting-and-breast-pinching
i was craving for security
the kind i had only known while
aimlessly-afloat-and-speculating-in-the-womb (7-12)

This poem has been written in the form of a subjective mode. Each line reflects the pain of a woman who is threatened by the fear of insecurity and domination. Since she had been exploited number of times by her husband, she found herself helpless in this society. India is the place where marital rape is unseen as a taboo because of high percentage of illiteracy and patriarchal traditional customs. Meena Kandasamy longed for a peaceful protection which she enjoyed in her mother’s womb. “i am locked away / a terrified princess waiting / for-death-and-not-any-brave-prince” (14-16). Instead of waiting for a brave prince, she is waiting to agree the proposal of death. The poetess believed that only death can relieve her from her physical and psychological agonies of victimhood. From this, it is understood that more than a criminal, victim is blamed in India.

Kamala Das is an Indian English Poet from Kerala. She is known as the Mother of modern Indian English Poems. She speaks openly for women struggling under some male chauvinists. Her poems expose the brutal face of sexual and domestic oppressions. She refused to identify herself as a feminist though she writes about inequalities. “An Introduction” is a poem in which how a woman is prohibited to do whatever she likes and the patriarchal mould reminds female about gender. “Don't write in English, they said, English is / Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave / Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins” (7-9). She is not even allowed to write in language she loved. She had been forced to be inside like a patriarchal cage which restricts women’s independency.

My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,

Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows. (35-39)

As an Indian woman she is expected to dress only in sarees, rather than modern outfits which she prefers. The conventions keep on warning women that she is a girl, so she must be a good cook, embroiderer and servant supervisor. She was restricted to sit on the wall or peep through windows. They forced her to fit inside the boundary of culture and tradition.

Conclusion

All the above discussed poems quarrel about the restrictions trying to cage women. Through their writings these writers feel a unexplainable rehabilitation for their self. The above writers like Taslima Nasrin, Meena Kandasamy and Kamala Das are born and brought up in different soil but the inequality and harassment they faced are the same. It is the responsibility of the women to make the man understand that she is equal to him and she is not just an object of pleasure used at dusk. Only if this effort becomes ceaseless the tamed gender can eradicate the ebbs and flows in the society.

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